GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
RAILWAYS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:5693
ANSWERED ON:02.05.2002
PROCUREMENT OF SLEEPER
PRABHUNATH SINGH

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Forest Research Institute (FRI) Dehradun has expressed their reservations about the quality of `Balau` sleepers to be imported from Malaysia in May,1987 and advised the Railway Board to procure small quantity for trial but the Railway Board ignored the advice of FRI and resorted to bulk procurement of 2,69,690 wooden sleepers worth Rs. 20.03 crore resulted into total loss of money;

(b) whether the matter has been brought to the notice of the Railway Board in May 2001 but their reply is still awaited by the CAG; and

(c) if so, the reasons for ignoring the FRI recommendations and not taking stern action against the firm as pointed out by the CAG in its report 9 of 2002 than only banning business with it for just three years?

Answer

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINIST RAILWAYS (SHRI O. RAJAGOPAL)

(a) & (c) No sir. In response to a specific reference from Ministry of Railways,in Feb. 1986, Forest Research Institute (FRI), Dehradun advised that Balau was described as very hard, heavy, strong and durable wood and superior to Indian Sal (Shorea Robusta) in all respects and the wood being stronger than Indian Sal wood from strength point of viewwas suitable for Railway sleepers. Later in May, 1987 it also apprised Railways of certain inherent drawbacks of Balau woodsuch as, it was liable to splitting on drying and, checking , splitting and surface cracking during air seasoning under Malayasian conditions and it recommended procurement of a small quantity for trial purpose. As the FRI did not conduct any tests on the Balau timber itself and its advice was based onpublished literature, Indian Railways also obtained the first hand information from Director, Civil Engineering, Ministry of Transport, Malayasian Railways (PKTM) who recommended use of Balau wood for Railway sleepers as (PKTM) had been using this wood on their system and based on recommendations of FRI and PKTM Indian Railways decided to import a small quantity of41,399 cum. of Balau wood for Railway sleepers.

This quantity was considered adequate for conducing field trial in varying field conditions on different Zonal Railways.

In fact, the decision of importing Balau wood was not questionable as such, the real problem arose when the supplier did not supply Balau wood and instead sleepers made of Kampas wood were supplied. In respect of supply made by M/s. Madhya Pradesh Export Corporation (MPEC), the matter was investigated by Railway Board Vigilance and CBI.The concerned Railway officials as well as State Government officials have been taken up under DAR for the malpractices.On the recommendation of CBI, proceedings against MPEC for banning of business dealings for a period of 5 years have also been initiated.Similarly, M/s B.N Padia `s case was investigated by zonal Railway vigilance and they were blacklisted for indulging in malpractices and the concerned Railway officials were taken up under DAR.

(b) The C&AG`s report has been presented to the Parliament (Lok Sabha) only on 22.3.2002As per extant norms, concerned Ministries are given a time of 4 months to prepare Action Taken Note on the various paragraphs for consideration of the C&AG. Ministry of Railways will prepare Draft Action Taken Note on paragraphs concerned to it and submit the same to the office of C&AG within the given time frame for consideration of C&AG.